

Memorial Day

10

IN MEMORIAM.

On this day a united nation kneels with bowed and uncovered head at the graves of their heroic dead. The sisterhood of States stands with locked shields like a guard of honor. Gratitude weaves the fragrant garlands which the hand of patriotism lays tenderly upon their sacred dust. If the perils they braved, the sufferings they endured, the pain and toil and hunger they bore, if the blood they spilt and the lives they sacrificed, have no inspiration for us, no grand lesson of duty, then are we unfaithful guardians of the heritage they bequeathed to us, unworthy to perpetuate the Government they died to save for us.

“These dead but sceptered sovereigns
Rule our spirits from their urns.”

The beautiful and impressive ceremonies of Decoration Day should keep their memory green and kindle with a brighter flame the love of country in every heart. Its recurrence is full of suggestion, glorious in association. A public demonstration like this, commemorating their valor, virtues and work, is not only mete and proper, but is the spontaneous offering of a thankful people. The purpose of it is to preserve from oblivion the hard won fame of those citizens of the Republic who made disease a companion, famine a familiar and death a glory in her defense. For there is some danger that the swift flight of time, the toil and moil of the clamorous present may fade the freshness of that renown which should be as perennial as spring, as imperishable as the

everlasting hills. For when the pent up wrath of the storm bursts in fury over land and sea, marking its track with prostrate forests and stranded navies fear and alarm fill the soul. But when the morning breaks and a radiant sun shines upon a smiling earth and glossy sea, that fear is but dimly remembered as a disturbed vision of the night. And so it comes to pass that this tempest of blood, with its waste and want and woe, is pushed aside from our daily thoughts by the return of peace and prosperity. But this ought not to be. We may forgive but we should not forget. To forget would be disloyalty to the dead, ingratitude to the living. This is not fanning the dying embers of discord, nor is it keeping alive sectional divisions. It is merely the simple recognition of the historical fact that there was a line between those who fought against the Union to destroy it, and those who fought for the Union to preserve it. And that line, like the one betwixt heaven and hell, is forever ineffaceable. The members of the Grand Army of the Republic, both living and dead, did not go forward at the command of any man or set of men. They had a personal interest, a personal hope, a personal concern. The high moral quality of their work, sublime purpose and exalted aspirations were so many splendid tributes to our common manhood. With their own blood they washed out the stain from our escutcheon and left on our shield only the name and hope of universal liberty. We cannot shut our eyes to the lustre of their achievements, nor stop our ears to the shout of triumph they won from an applauding world. We must know and understand,

now and always, that the rebellion was treason and those engaged in it were traitors. God does know "who was right and who was wrong" in this rebellion as He knew when he hurled rebels from the battlements of heaven. The war against the Union should be spoken of as it deserves. Platitudes, soft phrases and glittering generalities should find no employment in describing it. Its enormity should not be disguised. In bad eminence it stands unparalleled. The darkest page in the bloody annals of this sad world shines bright and pure in comparison to it. It was the most stupendous crime of the nineteenth century. Murder and lust and rapine lashed into remorseless play by passion set on fire with malice, knowing no limit, acknowledging no restraint, could not in their triple iniquity afflict this country as dreadfully as did this most foul and wicked conspiracy. The tears, the groans, the sighs it caused—the hearthstones it darkened—the households it broke up—the family ties it sundered—the orphans and widows it clad in mourning weeds—the wounds and cripples, waste, destruction, and immorality it burdened and cursed the land with, will never be known until that day comes when all things shall be weighed in the exact scales of eternal justice. It was a crime, too, without excuse. It absolutely had no justification. Wrong in no form ground the face of the South. No civil right was withheld from it, no faculty of government was denied it, no privilege was interfered with. No oppression or threat of oppression in the shape of unjust laws or unequal taxation or in any other shape arrested her energies or touched her trade and

commerce. It enjoyed to the fullest extent the protection of the flag and all the benefits of the constitution were secured to it. The Government, like the atmosphere around us, blessed all and oppressed none. But yet her people flew to arms and struck at the life of the nation. They might as well have struck your mother! The echo of the first gun in Charleston harbor was like the shiver of death. That instant the North uprose. Mighty in its strength, terrible in its awful resolution to suppress and punish treason, it moved forward on its painful and solemn mission, silent and slow, without rest, without haste—never pausing until the flag of the Union once more waved in triumph over an indivisible Republic. That uprising of the people was the most magnificent spectacle the world ever witnessed. England and France may boast of their epochs of glory, but here the white heat of patriotism fused and melted into a living unit a nation of heroes. The glorious infection spread to all ranks. The whole continent was turned into a camp. All day long was heard the measured tramp of armed men. Martial music filled the air; the fife pierced the ear; the throb of the drum stirred the blood. The word of command rang out on all sides, the drilling of men went on late in the night in spacious halls and open fields. One common sentiment of patriotism animated the masses, controlled their thoughts, shaped their feelings. Every trade and profession contributed its complement of men. They came from the hills and valleys, from hamlet, village and city. The man of God left his pulpit, the farmer his plow, the lawyer his client, the clerk fled

his desk, the student closed his books, the mechanic flung down his tools, the laborer threw away his implements, and all poured in an unbroken stream to the front. Such scenes and the causes that produced them were enough to kindle a fire under the ribs of death itself. It was a fiery outburst of enthusiasm! And all these with one consenting voice declared that separation should never be, neither peaceful nor hostile, for either would eternize war. The grand aspirations of humanity cried out against it. The hopes of Christianity pleaded against it. The genius of our institutions frowned upon it. The principles of the Constitution forbade it. The map of the country, the imperial lines of commerce, as long as the Mississippi and as broad as the Atlantic, declared that separation should never be. Treason could not rescind the ordinances of nature, traitors could not annul the decrees of destiny. And the Grand Army of the Republic, taking up the cry, wrote the Constitution with the point of the bayonet and proclaimed it at the mouth of cannon.

If the rebellion had succeeded there would have been an end of popular government. Two rival republics, separated by an imaginary line, with diverse and antagonistic interests, could no more have existed on the same territory than two stars can revolve in the same orbit. With no common bond to hold them together these free and ancient Commonwealths would have split up into petty provinces, each one jealous of the other, and all of them the easy prey of any foreign foe. The seed of disintegration would have produced its logical

and natural fruit in ultimate disruption, thus fulfilling the unwelcome prediction of the brilliant Macaulay. The discordant interests of different States, bitter rivalries, the struggle among them for wealth and power, the intrigues and ambitions of men would have resulted in wars of conquest and aggrandizement, ending in the entire overthrow of our system of constitutional government. And then Despotism, that last savior of society, would have stepped in to quell anarchy, making a desolation and calling it peace. And thus the experiment of government by the people would have been one of the most mournful and conspicuous failures of the world, a standing argument to point the moral that kingcraft is ordained of God.

But the Grand Army of the Republic saved us from such a disaster, and vindicated the right and capacity of man for self-government. It took four wars to make that principle sure and stable. It did not spring like Minerva from the brain of Jove, full armed and complete. But it had to be watered with blood and salted with fire before the fluent thought of ages was crystalized into the American idea—an idea that even liberalized the politics of England, and was a potent factor in transforming France into a Republic. It is a pregnant fact in the history of this country that every one of those four wars seems to have been necessary to develop and establish it. For, underlying each of them the same unity of thought is discernible, the same unity of purpose modifies and silently directs them. Now, mark its successive steps and see how by virtue of the American idea the State exists for the individual, and not the individual for the State. The patient struggle of eight years of revolution against King, Ministry and Parliament was the germ that blossomed into what Carlyle fitly calls "Ameri-

can Saxondom," and which our own Webster, in the shadow of Bunker Hill, said was "the prodigy of modern times; the wonder and blessing of the world." Then came the war of 1812, waged to carry forward still further that principle and to teach the world that the flag of the Union, floating at the masthead of our ships, should protect from search and seizure the humblest of our countrymen. And the sharp, decisive Mexican campaign, begun by scheming politicians in the interest of human bondage, ended in the acquisition of the Pacific slope, whose air is too pure for a slave to breathe. But the circle of events was completed, and that principle firmly settled as the foundation stone of our political structure, by the final and victorious success of the armed forces of the Union. And the Grand Army of the Republic, both living and dead, achieved the immortal honor of having made the Declaration of Independence at last a living reality.

What, then, do we owe to these scarred veterans of the war of the Rebellion?

I. We owe to them an illustration of what free institutions can do to create an invincible citizen soldiery.

II. We owe to them examples of personal heroism, fortitude and devotion, excelling in moral beauty the best displays of these qualities in Greece or Rome.

III. We owe to them a reverent submission to law and order on their return from the field with arms in their hands, fresh from scenes of violence and carnage, falling back into the stillness of private life without a shock to society or a disturbance of its peace.

IV. We owe to them the consecration of our whole country to universal freedom and the equality of all men before the law.

V. We owe to them the utter destruction of the political heresy that a State or any number of them can nullify a Federal law or dissolve this Union.

VI. We owe to them that we are one people—a nation, and not a mass, not an aggregation of atoms, but a nation in the true political sense, able to take care of ourselves at home and defend ourselves abroad against all comers.

VII. We owe to them that our country is still the hope of mankind, to which the oppressed of other lands look with longing eyes and beating hearts to share with us the peace, prosperity and personal independence guaranteed by the Constitution. What a record is this! and what manner of men must they have been who made it! They proved that our soil is good to be born on, good to live on, good to die on and be buried in. The grand possibilities of our National development are beyond the grasp of the most comprehensive mind. We need not fear that the genius of history will ever wander, lone and melancholy, amid the stately ruins of this fabric of constitutional government and tell the story of the fall and death of freedom. No! rather she will dip her pen in the brilliant hues of the morning and write on the scroll of the centuries: This people loved liberty and feared God; their institutions were free, founded on the indestructible principles of righteousness; they built up true manhood, fostered virtue, rebuked vice; intelligence dignified labor; contentment sweetened industry; while the individual, poised on the axis of personal responsibility, limited by nothing but the curve of moral law, he belonged only to his Maker; their domain was wide and rich in all kinds of precious gems, ores and metals; their rivers were deep enough to float navies, their mountains were clothed with forests like the shadows of eternity! Surely, they were the special favorites of Providence so that they might lead the nations of the earth to a higher civilization, a broader humanity, a better and nobler life!